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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WARSAW 004045

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/09/2020

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SUBJECT: POLAND'S CIVIC PLATFORM -- THE JILTED BRIDE
PONDERS THE FUTURE

REF: WARSAW 4020

Classified By: Political Counselor Mary T. Curtin for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY. Poland's leading opposition party, the Civic Platform (PO), hopes to cast itself as the only viable political alternative to the ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS), although its sudden metamorphosis from would-be coalition leader to outspoken critic has led some Poles, including those who supported PO, to question where the party is headed. Party leaders admit that after preparing to govern for much of the last two years, they were stunned by the election results and their subsequent rupture with PiS. Rumors persist of an eventual split in the party, which PO leaders vigorously deny. Whatever the real level of internal division, the party faces a significant challenge in broadening its electoral support. End Summary.

What Just Happened?

2. (C) PO remains popular, polling just behind PiS but well ahead of other parties, despite twin defeats in the parliamentary and presidential elections. PO officials, including Secretary General Grzegorz Schetyna and Sejm deputy Slawomir Rybicki, admit that their party spent much of the last two years planning on governing Poland, and were stunned to watch their dominant position erode under withering attacks from their would-be coalition partner, PiS. Schetyna told poloff on December 8 that a certain amount of soul searching was to be expected, particularly after the anticipated coalition with PiS failed to come together. Rybicki was blunter, saying that PO was defeated by PiS's distorted and inaccurate attacks.

3. (C) Feelings within PO toward PiS are varied -- Schetyna for one said that eventually the parties would likely gravitate anew to some kind of coalition -- particularly if PiS officials risk early elections, and end up with similar results to this fall's parliamentary round. "We are the natural partners to one another," Schetyna told poloff. Rybicki, who is a confidant of failed PO presidential candidate Donald Tusk, had a somewhat more raw assessment of PiS. "They were never interested in a coalition," Rybicki asserted to poloff on December 8. Rybicki believes that PiS always planned to go it alone, and is pursuing an agenda of swallowing up support from right-wing and nationalist parties (reftel), while continuing its efforts to cast PO as a party of the left. "They will continue to try to force us to the left, but it won't work," Rybicki told poloff. He said further that the PO leadership was uniformly committed to keeping the party together and providing a constructive, centrist alternative to the government.

Will PO Stay Together?

4. (C) Whether to form an eventual coalition or to tough it out in the opposition, PO will need to avoid splintering into pieces, which is the common experience of Polish opposition politics. PO's health expert, Sejm deputy Andrzej Sosnierz promptly was expelled from PO on December 13 after he predicted that PO would break apart. Schetyna and Rybicki were both careful to say that the party is united, and prepared for the next round of elections -- whether snap elections called by PiS or the local elections scheduled for next fall. This runs counter to rumors in Warsaw that circulated as soon as the coalition talks failed, detailing a bitter rivalry between party leaders Jan Rokita and Donald Tusk, and speculating that Rokita will cut a deal to carry his supporters over to PiS. While denying this, Rokita has sent mixed signals. On December 10, Rokita announced a lineup of PO officials who will serve as shadow ministers in opposition to the PiS government. However, Rokita and Tusk reportedly disagree on the composition of the shadow cabinet, with Rokita preferring experts and Tusk preferring PO deputies serving in the Sejm. Rokita has also not been shy about criticizing fellow PO members, as he did December 11 when he suggested that Bronislaw Komorowski was uninformed when speaking about the CIA rendition issue.

5. (C) Most of our contacts in PO doubt that the Kaczynski brothers will risk early elections, and predict that the current PiS honeymoon will be short-lived. They point to

LPR's and Samoobrona's current, diminished polling numbers and believe both parties grudgingly will opt to support the government because they have greater leverage now. PO believes that the Marcinkiewicz government will limp along, spending an increasing amount of political capital on tethering its unofficial partners.

16. (C) If elections are called, PO remains the party favored by urban and educated Poles. Before the parliamentary round, one successful Sejm candidate confided in poloff that "anyone who is educated in Poland" was a PO supporter. This kind of collective party hubris fell flat with rural voters, who delivered whopping majorities to PiS. And so far, we see little to suggest that PO is reaching out to appeal to rural, religious voters, although Schetnya did confirm press reports that PO has talked with the Polish Peasant Party (PSL) about possible cooperation in local elections. In the meantime, they watch the parade of PiS politicians interviewed on conservative Radio Maryja and hope that the Catholic Church hierarchy will do more to clamp down on its leader, Father Rydzyk. After taking an electoral beating by PiS on their macro-economic policies, PO hopes to educate Polish farmers that their more EU-friendly party will continue to deliver benefits from Brussels. At this stage, this is far from compelling.

Comment

17. (C) PO faces a hurdle in overcoming its liberal image and gaining supporters beyond its core constituents, who represent upwards of a third of the electorate. If PO is to survive, it must find a more persuasive argument with Catholic voters in the countryside who view themselves as the losers in Poland's economic transformation, and regard PO as something urban, separate and hostile to their values. End Comment.

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